

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LANDSCAPE OFFICE
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1357)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AJ
HABS CA-2800-AJ

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LANDSCAPE OFFICE (Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1357) Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AJ

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located centrally in an open grassy area bounded by Consuelo Street to the north, Erickson Avenue to the east, Dahlia Street to the west, and Bonita Street to the south.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754088 N; 392558.2 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Landscape Office is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post World War II years. The building was erected in 1938 to serve as the landscaping office for the grounds supervisor of Rancho Los Amigos (the name changed in 1932 from County Poor Farm to Rancho Los Amigos). Landscaping had been considered an important part of the overall design of the Poor Farm since its founding in 1888. The landscaping was carefully crafted over the years to create a beautiful, lush welcoming environment for the patients, staff, and visitors. This building served as the landscaping administrative office for many years until the deterioration of the grounds in the late twentieth-century. The building is currently abandoned.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1938¹
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Landscape Office.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

¹ According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Landscape Office.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Landscape Office.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations include the replacement of the original wood framed windows with metal sliding windows and the replacement of the roofing material with rolled composition shingles.

B. Historic Context:

The historic character of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District has been shaped by its design, including its landscape design, which has evolved over the facility's approximately 120 year history into the campus apparent today. Although the landscaping department of the County Poor Farm was not officially established until the early 1900s, landscaping was always an integral component of the design and activities of the institution. This concern was evident from the initial site plan and work on the property. Local laborers were employed to clear the land, grade the roadways, and plant eucalyptus saplings along planned walkways and roads, as well as along much of the property's periphery. The eucalyptus trees provided a supply of hard wood for use in building fence posts, and created a shaded, lush setting for the grounds. Groupings of native willows and sycamores were left in place and dozens of small areas were prepared for plantings of roses and various flowers. According to Fleidner, "By the end of February, 1888, the Board of Supervisors noted that the task of planting the shade and ornamental trees had been completed, and everything was ready for the buildings to be constructed."²

To maintain the extensive gardens of the Poor Farm, Superintendent Chick established a Landscape Department in 1907. Mr. O.D. Pond was hired as the first full-time gardener, with a monthly salary of \$50. Pond was responsible for directing the landscaping efforts at the Poor Farm, primarily through the use of inmates who provided the labor to maintain the growing expanse of lawns, trees and gardens at the Farm. By 1917, the Farm included a separate area with ancillary buildings and tools specifically for landscaping the property grounds.

Over the years, the professional maintenance of the grounds of what is now South Campus was supplemented by the patient-residents. The able-bodied general ward patients kept steady jobs and supplied much of the manpower needed to keep the South Campus operating smoothly. In addition to working at the farm and dairy, approximately 125 patients were employed on the landscaping crews, keeping specific areas of the South Campus landscape manicured and clean of debris.

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

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The Rancho Los Amigos grounds were a priority for Superintendent Harriman in the 1920s, who reserved a significant portion of the annual budget to maintain and improve the landscape of the South Campus, through the purchase of trees, shrubs and irrigation systems. Believing that the setting offered patients beneficial healing powers, Harriman insisted that the landscape of the property be maintained at the same level of excellence reflected in the new architecture of the South Campus.

During the 1920s, the entrance into the Poor Farm on the east gained prominence with the construction of the new Administration Building in 1926 (LACO No. 1100). The street was given the name Administration Drive (later re-named Consuelo Street) and officially became the primary entranceway into the institution. Administration Drive was distinguished by a recognizable curve, which began east near the entrance to the Administration Building and bent northwest around the east and north elevations of the building. Two circular driveways landscaped with mature trees and lawns filled the space created by the curvature of Consuelo Street. This organized lawn setting created a distinct separation between the public Administration Building and the private inmate and support buildings located farther west on Consuelo Street toward the center of South Campus. These characteristics are still visible today.

In 1929, an ornamental courtyard was created just east of the Auditorium and the Dining Room, Kitchen, Staff Room / Commissary and Receiving Room Complex in the center of South Campus after the original Administration Building was demolished. Large flower beds were planted, and the walkways were paved with flagstone slabs. A sundial was also positioned to the rear of the gazebo (circa 1933). This area provided a green space for the inmates and staff, as well as creating a focal point for the historic traffic circle at the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Consuelo Street. The curvature of these streets around the traffic circle has remained generally in the same configuration, except for a slight alteration to the western edge of the traffic circle when Erickson Avenue (then Horton Avenue) was widened circa 1950.

By the end of the 1920s, landscape improvements at the farm included one mile of paved roads, one and one-fourth miles of decomposed granite roads, cast-iron sewer piping, and hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, curbs, walkways and fencing. Despite the lull in building construction caused by the Depression, improvements to the landscape at the Farm continued throughout the early 1930s. Acres of new lawn were planted throughout the property and an automatic sprinkler system was installed.

Superintendent Harriman appeared to take pride in the expansion and development of the landscape at the Farm, stating in his 1932–1933 Annual Report:

As a further step toward mental and physical welfare of the patients, the grounds surrounding their homes are beautifully landscaped and maintained in perfect order and cleanliness at all times. Acres of flower gardens provide cut flowers in abundance and these are used in decorating the wards through the year. Many patients assist trained crews of gardeners in the general care of the lawns and gardens and the propagation of plants, trees and shrubs in the operation of the

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greenhouse. Around the grounds, numerous benches are placed in the shade of the magnificent eucalyptus trees that have bordered the drives for nearly fifty years.

Harriman continued to emphasize the importance of the landscaping on the South Campus. In 1934, he reported that the eucalyptus trees were maintained at 75 feet tall. The buildings were surrounded. The work of landscaping was largely controlled by landscape supervisors with patient labor. By 1935, a little before the Landscape Office was built, the landscaping department employed some 24 men.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The wood vernacular style Landscape Office is one-story, asymmetrical in appearance and rectangular in plan. The east façade primary entrance is offset to the north and is sheltered within a full-width porch covered by a shed roof supported on four squared wood posts. Vents composed of horizontal louvers are located near the roofline of the east ends of the south and north elevations. Three low, concrete steps provide access to the main entrance. Two detached wood sheds are located to the west (rear) of the building. The building has retained most of its character-defining features that include: full-width porch with wooden floors and concrete steps; shed roof sloping down to the west; wood structural system; and board-and-batten siding.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Landscape Office is deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Landscape Office net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 299 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 299 square feet and a footprint of 299 square feet.³
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a raised wood foundation.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls consist of board-and-batten siding.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Landscape Office consists of a shed roof supported by wood-framed walls.
5. **Openings:**

³ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217-056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

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- a. **Windows:** Fenestration on all elevations consists primarily of a linear arrangement of variously sized aluminum sash sliders.
- b. **Doors:** The primary entrance on the east facade is offset to the north and consists of an original wood door.

6. Roof:

The building is capped by a shed roof sloping down towards the west that is covered in composition shingles.

- C. Description of Interior:** The interior of the Landscape Office is comprised of a single room with vinyl flooring.

D. Site:

- 1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Landscape Office consists of mature trees and patchy grass.
- 2. **Orientation:** The Landscape Office is located centrally in an open grassy area bounded by Consuelo Street to the north, Erickson Avenue to the east, Dahlia Street to the west, and Bonita Street to the south. The east façade is primary.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Landscape Office were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found architectural drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Landscape Office was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief

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Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.